

Dr Chalmers and the University of Glasgow

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It is a commonplace that the great schism in the Scottish church over the non-intrusionist issue had important effects on both Scottish society and party politics. The contest for the vacant chair of divinity, and the subsequent rectorial election at Glasgow University in 1840 showed how far the university system was caught up in the turmoil. The universities had long been associated with the ecclesiastical and political "establishment" in Scotland, and the determined onslaught of the Evangelicals was rightly regarded by their Moderate opponents as a direct challenge to their position throughout the country. The resulting furore has been reasonably well covered both in contemporary works and subsequent surveys, and the salient details are well known;¹ nevertheless, a closer examination of published and unpublished material does shed some new light both on the progress of events and the position of the universities in this period.²

Circumstances had combined to put all the Scottish universities in a beleaguered position from the 1820s on. They were identified with the Tory party and religious tests, and a general attitude of conservatism in kirk and state, whereas there was a new spirit especially among the young exemplified by philanthropic Evangelicals such as Thomas Chalmers. The result was seen in the consistent student enthusiasm for Whiggish "anti-Establishment" figures in the Glasgow rectorial elections; from the end of the Napoleonic wars the students increasingly crossed the principal and professors in their choice of candidate.³

Meanwhile, public disquiet was aroused by the growing evidence of the age, infirmity and incompetence of many of the university professors. There was also much criticism of the procedure of student election of rectors. The setting up of a commission to enquire into the Scottish universities in 1826 and the series of parliamentary discussions of Glasgow's problems just

1 E.g. D. Murray, *Memories of the Old College of Glasgow* (Glasgow, 1927), 70-72; W. Hanna, *Memoirs of Dr Chalmers* (Edinburgh, 1849-52), iv, 212-13; H. Watt, *Thomas Chalmers and the Disruption* (Edinburgh, 1943), 223; J. D. Mackie, *The University of Glasgow* (Glasgow, 1954), 261-2.

2 The authors thank the staff of Glasgow University Archives for help with the McFarlan Papers, the Bodleian and Glasgow University Libraries for the Graham Papers (on microfilm), the Scottish Record Office for the Dalhousie Papers, and the New College Library, Edinburgh, for the Chalmers Papers.

3 Mackie, *University of Glasgow*, 245-5; and see below n. 13.

before the divinity furore testified to this public disquiet.⁴ The university itself was aware of the problem of professorial delinquency, but could see no way of tackling it without a wholesale reform of the whole system.⁵ Duncan McFarlan, principal of the university since 1823, showed himself aware that the university “was regarded with some suspicion by the general public”.⁶ He had also been aware of the implications of a vacancy occurring in the chair of divinity. His own position in the faculty of divinity, in which he had exercised a dominant influence, was that of a “steady conservative”. By mid-1840, as it became clear that Stevenson McGill’s days as professor of divinity were numbered, Macfarlan began immediate soundings among the ranks of the Moderates for a successor.⁷

Stevenson McGill died on 18 August 1840; an “honest if somewhat ponderous Professor” in Mackie’s words, he had been a staunch defender of the ecclesiastical *status quo* since his appointment. The Rev. Dr Nathaniel Paterson, minister of St Andrew’s church in Glasgow, led the rush of applicants; by early September there were half-a-dozen candidates for the succession. Three could be dismissed as serious runners. Paterson was one, despite the promptness of his application. Dr Clason was another, despite his eminence in Evangelical (and, later, Free Church circles), and his energy and ambition — he had applied for the St Andrews chair in 1830 and was to apply for the chair of church history in Glasgow in 1841. The third, Robert Lee, might in more settled times have been a good choice, and was in fact to get a chair five years later.⁸ There were two stronger candidates. Dr Muir of St Stephen’s in Edinburgh, a respected “elder statesman” of the church, was to be adviser to Sir James Graham on crown patronage and church affairs in Scotland. In some ways he was the least unacceptable candidate, as far as the contending factions were concerned, though Free Church circles later blamed him for helping to bring about the schism.⁹ Robertson of Ellon had

4 Mackie, *University of Glasgow*, 255-9. In the event, the Commission’s report was never accepted.

5 See, for example, the evidence given by the university to the 1826 Commission: *Report*, H. C. (1831), xii, 111; *Evidence* (1837), xxvi, 1.

6 Mackie, *University of Glasgow*, 253.

7 James Robertson, minister of Ellon, records that McFarlan had approached him about the expected vacancy during the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland (May, 1840) and subsequently in August. S[cottish] R[ecord] O[ffice], Dalhousie Papers, Robertson to the Earl of Dalhousie, 24 Sept. 1840; B[ritish] L[ibrary], Additional MSS. 43237, Aberdeen Papers, Robertson to Aberdeen, 11 June 1840; A. H. Charteris, *Life of the Reverend James Robertson* (Edinburgh and London, 1863), 106.

8 R. H. Story, *Life and Remains of Robert Lee, D.D.* (London, 1870), i, 57-58.

9 Muir had obviously been, at best, a most reluctant candidate. Aberdeen had written to a friend that he had pressed Muir’s claim upon Graham: BL, Add. MSS. 43327, Aberdeen Papers, 29 Oct. 1840; and there was much newspaper speculation on his chances. Yet, on the eve of the election, he had proclaimed in the *Glasgow Herald* that he would not stand.

written nothing of consequence, but had excellent connections: Aberdeen, the lord rector (Sir James Graham), the principal (McFarlan), and the Earl of Dalhousie were all prepared to sponsor his candidature.¹⁰ The strongest runner among the Moderates, however, was Dr Alexander Hill — son of the late principal of St Mary's college in St Andrews, generally regarded as a competent rather than a distinguished candidate, but at least holding safe opinions.

It was not clear for a while whether Chalmers would indeed stand. He was no longer young, and did, after all, hold the Edinburgh chair. The intervention of Robert Buchanan, minister of the Tron Church in Glasgow, seems to have been decisive here. Buchanan, perhaps the leading Evangelical minister in the west of Scotland (and later the historian of the "Ten Years Conflict"), wrote to Chalmers on 31 August: "We are all in a state of great anxiety in reference to the filling up of the vacant chair of Divinity in our university. None can better understand or appreciate than yourself how much depends upon this appointment. Dr Hill is understood to be the candidate of the Principal's party in the College — a man of no mind, and who in so far as he is capable of exerting any influence at all, would exert it in the way of a wet blanket. And so strong is the Moderate party in the College that unless we had such a candidate as would by his fame bear down all opposition I fear the worst . . . were you to see fit to allow yourself to be named, as a matter of course no other candidate would or could keep the field".¹¹

An interesting supporting argument followed: it was the Glasgow chair that had to be captured, because the electors — the faculty — were so much under the influence of the Moderate party. In Edinburgh, the domination of the university by the town council meant the Moderates could not hope to gain the divinity chair after Chalmers. Glasgow, however, might be a different matter. Two of the electors were possible converts to the Chalmers cause — the dean of faculties (Kirkman Finlay), and Sir James Graham, the rector. This was to be an over-optimistic view of Chalmers' chances on Buchanan's part, as events were to prove.

Chalmers acknowledged the letter from Buchanan and then, according to his Journals, consigned the matter to his Creator. Whatever his own views upon the subject, they do not appear to have been committed to print. His increasing age may well have made him wary of the proposed translation. On the other hand, there was a strong financial inducement to move. Despite a good

¹⁰ SRO, Dalhousie Papers, Robertson to Dalhousie, 24 Sept., 10 Oct. 1840; McFarlan to Dalhousie, 15 Oct. 1840; Glasgow University Archives, McFarlan Papers (461).

¹¹ New College Library, C[halmers] P[apers], Buchanan to Chalmers (at present uncatalogued).

deal of public speculation to the contrary, his Edinburgh salary does not seem to have exceeded £200 per annum. According to his daughter, even the upkeep of his house would have required the salary to be supplemented with students' fees and his own private means. After Edinburgh Corporation had gone bankrupt in the 1820s his salary had probably not been paid at all — or may not have been paid in full. In Glasgow, on the other hand, his salary would be more than doubled, and in addition to his students' fees he would have received a free house.¹² At any rate, McFarlan, who had at first disbelieved the rumours of Chalmers' candidature, had been warned by Graham to expect his entry into the lists on 6 September, and an application had been received by 8 September: "It appears to me the strangest fancy that ever entered into a human mind" he wrote.¹³ Apart from the written application, Chalmers seems to have been content to leave the prosecution of the business to his supporters in Glasgow.

And so the struggle began. It was to be accompanied by a vociferous press campaign on Chalmers' behalf, ranging from such Evangelical newspapers as the *Scottish Guardian* to the *Times*. Much emphasis was placed on the mediocrity — at best — of Hill and his fellow Moderates. The contest was to be one between "Dr Nobody" (as the *Times* described Hill) and a man whose name was "co-extensive in its reputation with the civilized world".¹⁴ Of the writings of Dr Hill, the *Times* of 23 October declared that: "We find not only has he never produced a single work upon theology, or literature, or philosophical criticism, but that his humble compilations upon the forms of procedure in Church Courts . . . are of the most contemptible character imaginable".

Not all were to agree with this estimate of Hill, but the attack by the Chalmers forces clearly made its mark. A more threatening language was also used. On 6 October the leader of the *Scottish Guardian* wrote of the attitude of Sir James Graham: ". . . the fact of his opposing Dr Chalmers will be an indication, as clear as the light of the sun, that Sir Robert Peel, and the leaders of his party, have made up their mind to identify their policy with a determined opposition to the Evangelical side of the Church. . . . By that one vote, if it be in opposition to Dr Chalmers, there are

12 Murray, *Memories*, 71; *Letters and Journals of Anne Chalmers*, edd. by her daughters (London, 1922), 195.

13 Glasgow University Archives, McFarlan Papers, excerpt of a letter to Kirkman Finlay. Finlay, a prosperous merchant and member of parliament, had been elected rector of the university in 1819, and then not re-elected in 1820, largely because the students had suspected him of wanting to deprive them of their votes in rectorial elections. Judging solely from McFarlan's letters, Kirkman Finlay played an important rôle in mobilising the anti-Chalmers forces, although, as was seen, Buchanan had hoped to see him in the Chalmers camp.

14 *Scottish Guardian*, 15 Sept., 23 Oct. 1840.

hundreds, nay thousands, of votes in other elections that will infallibly be determined". The *Times* of 14 October, in an article reprinted in the *Scottish Guardian* six days later, warned the faculty of Glasgow: ". . . that in these inquisitorial times their strict avoidance of everything like partisanship or jobbery in filling up the professorship at their disposal constitutes their only chance of securing public respect, and of escaping the suspended discipline of parliament".

The Conservative forces, meanwhile, had lost no time in mobilizing themselves for the fight to stop Chalmers. McFarlan himself clearly played a key rôle in the pre-election manoeuvring. He had written to Dr Jeffray, the professor of anatomy, at the beginning of the contest, of the necessity of choosing a man of "piety and sound principles" in the "present excited condition of Church and State". On the same day he wrote to Sir James Graham of the "great importance of the issue both to the University and the Country at Large".¹⁵ McFarlan promptly set to work alerting his allies in Glasgow and the other Scottish universities, and the whole Scottish Conservative "establishment". He himself had no fixed preferences among the Moderate candidates. Although he had suggested to Robertson of Ellon that he should offer himself for the chair, he regarded himself as free from all engagements. The overriding priority, to him, was to avoid all divisions in the defence of "constitutional principles" in order to "avert the calamity with which we have been threatened". He seems to have agreed with his colleague Haldane, the principal at St Mary's college, St Andrews, who had written to him in favour of Hill. But his duty, as he saw it, was to support the Moderate candidate who could command the most widespread support.¹⁶

The Conservatives in Scotland needed no prompting from McFarlan about the danger of the Chalmers challenge. Peel, Aberdeen and Graham were all directly concerned with the implications of the church-state crisis, and both of the latter had been in constant and close touch with Chalmers in the early stages of the conflict in 1839-40. Aberdeen and Chalmers had indeed worked for a legislative compromise which would sanction some form of congregational veto on presentees, but the negotiations foundered on what seems to have been a mutual misunderstanding. Aberdeen had therefore some reason to feel

¹⁵ Glasgow University Archives, McFarlan Papers (447), 21 Aug. 1840.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, McFarlan Papers (460, 461), McFarlan to Dr Meikleham, 30 Sept. 1840; McFarlan to Rev. Dr Robertson, Oct. 1840. McFarlan discussed his assessment of both Hill and Robertson with Finlay on 13 Oct. 1840. Robertson he thought younger and more energetic, but Hill was better-known and "had a better-natured appearance". But either would serve. (*Ibid.*, McFarlan to Finlay.) For McFarlan's refusal to pledge his support, see SRO, Dalhousie Papers, Robertson to Dalhousie, 10 Oct. 1840.

bitterness as the contest developed. Writing to Graham on 19 October 1840 of what he termed Chalmers' desperate measures to sustain his defiance of the law, he added, "there is no end of his weakness and inconsistency".¹⁷ Graham, too, had become impatient with their opponent. In the middle of his protracted correspondence with Chalmers he had echoed Aberdeen's sentiments: "I admire his talents, I acquit him of worldly ambitions. I give him credit for genuine piety and fervent religious zeal: but I can no longer trust his prudence, or believe his promises".¹⁸

There were other personal grounds for doubting the fitness of Chalmers for the chair. His age and the reputation he had acquired at Edinburgh were often cited. McFarlan had written to Graham:¹⁹

"With a high appreciation of that gentleman's genius and zeal, I have never thought that his high distinction consisted in his fitness for or success in the duties of a Theological Professor, and scarcely now, at his advanced age and with his confessedly diminished energy, his appointment to a new chair in that Department would be an experiment equally unprecedented and perilous".

Such objections, McFarlan added, were "altogether independent of his recent public conduct". These were restated and elaborated when McFarlan wrote to Kirkman Finlay of the forthcoming faculty deliberations:²⁰

"Dr Chalmers has by no means succeeded as a teacher of Divinity. His advanced years and the acknowledged failure of his bodily and mental energies, render his removal to a new and more laborious field of duty, to say the least, preposterous. His correspondence with Lord Aberdeen has not added to his reputation, and the part he still takes in Church Politics renders it impossible to countenance his claim without virtually adopting his views to which I need not say that mine are diametrically opposed".

Aberdeen, too, laid striking emphasis on the supposed personal deficiencies of Chalmers. On 25 September, he wrote to Peel that Graham had apprized him of the Chalmers candidature:

"I gave him my reasons for thinking it quite impossible that he should support Chalmers, under the present circumstances of the Church, in which he appeared disposed to acquiesce. There will undoubtedly be some difficulty in

17 Bodleian and Glasgow University Libraries, Graham Papers (microfilm 139A).

18 *Ibid.*, Graham to Colquhoun, 25 Dec. 1839.

19 Glasgow University Archives, McFarlan Papers (452), 8 Sept. 1840. (Chalmers, at sixty, was five years older than Hill.)

20 Glasgow University Archives, McFarlan Papers (457), 22 Sept. 1840.

finding a name sufficiently eminent to oppose to Chalmers, although it will be a very easy matter to produce a much better professor of divinity. . . . [A discussion of the chances of Dr Hill and Dr Muir.] At all events, the nomination of Chalmers would ruin the Theological Chair. His lectures at Edinburgh are so bad, that he has lost half his class. The students have gone to Glasgow; and if he were to be transferred, the same effect would probably take place there. The interests of the University would greatly suffer by his appointment”.

Aberdeen wrote to Graham later upon the same lines. “Nothing can be more unjust than Colquhoun’s description of Dr Hill as a man below mediocrity”, he wrote: “He is a gentleman and a scholar, and although not strictly speaking a learned man . . . I entertain no doubt whatever that he is infinitely better qualified for the professorship, if we are to look to the practical utility of the office, and to the interests of the university”.²¹

This estimate of Chalmers’ ability as a teacher was by no means universally accepted. Neither McFarlan nor Aberdeen was exactly unprejudiced over the issue, and it is possible that Chalmers’ disaffected students objected to his theological position rather than his rhetorical ability. In any case, the real point at issue was not the pedagogic merits of the rival candidates: it was, as Aberdeen said, “the part taken by Chalmers in the Church question”.

These arguments were plentifully rehearsed in the vigorous canvassing that seems to have taken place in the six weeks or so before the faculty voted. Public interest, as reflected in all the Scottish and most of the English newspapers, was intense, and there was much arid speculation on the position that would be adopted by the electors. Newspapers sympathetic to the Evangelical cause contrasted the obvious merits of Chalmers with the mediocrity of his opponents. The reputation of Glasgow for preferring mediocrities to great men in their appointments to chairs was brought up (the example of Burke often being quoted). Reference was made to the recent appointments to the chairs in moral philosophy and Hebrew, which had “been disposed of on other grounds than the ethical or mental eminence of the successful candidates”.²² Above all, should Glasgow run true to form, and fly in the face of the wishes of the people, then the

21 BL, Add. MSS. 40312, Peel Papers, Aberdeen to Peel, 25 Sept. 1840; Graham microfilm, 139A, Aberdeen to Graham, 27 Sept. 1840; see also Aberdeen to Graham, 19 Oct. 1840 on recent articles in the *Times* favouring Chalmers: “but you may be assured, that if the subject should furnish matter for future discussion the wretched performance of Dr Chalmers in his Edinburgh professorship will be fully exposed”.

22 *Scottish Guardian*, 20 Oct. 1840.

demand for university reform would overwhelm them. The *Times* dropped a thinly veiled hint in this direction on 14 October: "To suppose that the Glasgow professors are, at this moment, determined to try how far they can set public obloquy at defiance . . . were to argue an amount of infatuation on their part for which, we confess, we are unable to give them credit".

Wild speculation, gossip, rumour and counter-rumour accompanied the manoeuvrings of the parties. The Evangelical papers reported the faculty to be split down the middle. By September, Graham, the key man in finding a compromise candidate, was widely reported to be a supporter of Chalmers. The rumour, reported to McFarlan by his dean of faculty, had worried him enough to write to Graham before his arrival at Glasgow. Aberdeen had accepted the truth of the rumour a week earlier: "although I think your support of Dr Chalmers is much to be deprecated, I do not know that it is absolutely necessary for you to vote at all, in case you are unwilling to oppose him".²³

Much misunderstanding was generated — and perpetuated — by what McFarlan was to call the "system of enormous lying" that burgeoned during the contest. Did Graham consider supporting Chalmers? Or did he at least fail to vote in the crucial faculty meeting? (This belief seems to have been tenaciously held, despite the fact that Graham's attendance in both meetings is recorded in the faculty minutes.) Graham's account of the proceedings to Aberdeen answers both questions: it is clear that he had initial misgivings about voting against Chalmers, and equally clear that he then did. On 6 September he wrote:²⁴

"The vacancy in the Divinity chair at Glasgow at this juncture is embarrassing, and the nomination of Dr Chalmers as a candidate increases the difficulty. the appointment is in the gift of the College. The election will take place upon the end of my year of authority as Rector. and having promised to be present I cannot shrink from my duty.

In many respects Dr Chalmers is entitled to support. The pittance which he receives in Edinburgh is miserable, his talents are of the highest order; and in point of doctrine he is orthodox. He errs on a question of Discipline, and as Professor it is with Doctrine and not with Discipline that he ought to deal in the class-room. Yet considering his recent conduct, his bold defiance of constitutional authorities, and his slippery evasion of the just settlement which you

23 McFarlan had written to Graham on 21 Sept. 1840 about the rumours; a day later he had expressed his belief that his fears were without foundation: see Glasgow University Archives, McFarlan Papers (455, 456, 458).

24 BL, Add. MSS. 43190, Graham to Aberdeen, 6 Sept. 1840.

tendered, I am fully alive to the evil consequences of supporting him, and am most anxious for your advice.

The public feeling will run high in favour of Dr Chalmers; and the difficulty of opposing him will be increased if, as is most probable, no other eligible candidate can be produced. Moreover in the College itself there will be a strong party in his favour; if I oppose him, the friends of the Government will support him, and thus the union between them will be confirmed; and possibly he may be elected in spite of my resistance, when he will owe a favour to our opponents, who will magnify the benefit conferred, and claim in return the exercise of his popular influence.

My opposition is a decided breach with him: my support may possibly mollify him, and tho' he cannot recede, he may be induced by success to moderate his pace. . . ."

From this it seems clear that Graham, though undecided, was generally inclined to contest the candidature, and from what we have seen of Aberdeen's views it is highly probable that he stiffened Graham's resolve. Not that it seemed to need much stiffening: Once his mind had been made up, Graham took the offensive. An example may be seen in the correspondence between Graham and Lord Sandon, who had argued that Chalmers' appointment would be "not to a station of increased influence for the dissemination of his ecclesiastical opinions, but to one of greater ease and comfort to which in his old age he is so well entitled." He was, argued Sandon, widely regarded as Scotland's leading theologian and held in great esteem and affection, even by those who disagreed with him over the veto issue. The appointment of Chalmers would not be, in itself, a decisive step: but passing him over would shatter the Conservative forces in Scotland even further, and would certainly be regarded as a declaration of war to the death by the non-intrusionists.

Graham answered that he was "not disposed to yield to such menaces": adding:

". . . and we must take care that we do not erect a Lord and Master over us in Scotland, as unmanageable, and despotick as the Tyrant who enchains the Government in Ireland.

You think that this election can be regarded as an isolated question on the abstract merit of the candidates, without reference to the struggle now raging in the Kirk and to the state of parties generally in Scotland."

Neither party would regard the contest as such: the issue was one of secession from the Establishment, and Chalmers might here be placed upon a vantage ground: "when the path which he has chosen appears to be the high road to anarchy and schism . . . The Universities are the bulwarks of the Establishment: they must

not be converted into a platform from which heavy guns are to be trained for its overthrow".²⁵

Graham was perfectly aware of the implications of his step: "my vote on this occasion must be regarded as a foretaste of our policy on the Scotch church question", he wrote to Aberdeen; Chalmers "must be encountered, and this perhaps is a fit opportunity, which is of his own seeking".²⁶ When the friends of Chalmers referred to the vote against Chalmers as a "declaration of war", they were missing the point. This was what Graham now intended.

The formal election of a successor to McGill took place on 21 October, preceded by a deliberative meeting on 20 October. The canvassing had continued up until the last moment. On 19 October, Aberdeen had written to Graham that both Hill and Robertson were still favoured by the anti-Chalmers party (McFarlan, he thought, probably favouring the latter). In fact, McFarlan's view was that "either would serve": to Aberdeen the great point was unity.²⁷

In the event the meeting of 20 October voted by seven to four to offer the Chair to Hill. "The election of the Divinity Professor took place this morning", wrote Graham on 21 October:²⁸

"We had a preliminary discussion yesterday, when I took occasion to state distinctly the grounds on which I resisted the nomination of Dr Chalmers although he was my private friend and altho' I am an admirer of his genius and believe in the purity of his motives.

Twelve members of Faculty were present, Kirkman Finlay absent on account of the recent death of his daughter. We should have divided 7 to 4, the Principal in the chair not having a vote: but our opinions having been ascertained yesterday, Dr Chalmers was not proposed this morning, and Dr Hill was chosen without a division. If I had been authorized to state that Dr Muir would have accepted the appointment, I think I could have carried his election; but without any such authority it would have been imprudent to divide our strength; and two senior members of the Faculty decidedly proposed Dr Hill.

I am satisfied that the moment had arrived, when it was necessary to meet the anti-patronage agitation in front; and already I begin to perceive the good effects of this decisive demonstration on our part . . . if we are firm and

25 Graham Papers (microfilm 139A), Sandon to Graham, 23 Sept. 1840; Graham to Sandon, 25 Sept. 1840.

26 BL, Add. MSS. 43190, 8 Sept., 14 Sept. 1840.

27 Graham Papers (microfilm 139A), Aberdeen to Graham, 19 Oct. 1840; Glasgow University Archives, McFarlan Papers (463), McFarlan to Kirkman Finlay, 13 Oct. 1840.

28 BL, Add. MSS. 43190, to Aberdeen.

temperate, while they are wavering and violent, the cause of reason and of order is not desperate in Scotland. . . .”

This did not mollify the Chalmers camp in the slightest. On 21 October Buchanan wrote to Chalmers of the result:²⁹

“Professor Nichol in his letter giving me a full account of the whole matter, uses these words in reference to the violent part Sir Jas. Graham took in the business. ‘The fact is clear, in a most flagrant case, one of the most emphatic which could have occurred — *war is declared*. Your party must therefore act as it may for its safety — it cannot fail to see the amount of this menace.’

It is therefore as Colquhoun conjectured. Sir James has got or taken his cue from Sir Rob. Peel and their party, or at least its leaders, have make up their minds to ride roughshod over the spiritual liberties of the Church and People of Scotland.”

The defeat of Chalmers was also a significant stage in the ecclesiastical struggle. The hope of reconciliation had now virtually vanished. Aberdeen was also to play a rôle in the rejection of the prominent non-intrusionist Dr Candlish when the chair of biblical criticism was created at Edinburgh.³⁰ The attempts by the Moderates at Glasgow to conciliate their opponents were spurned. Murray records: “When Dr Hill came into residence he held out the olive branch and invited the Ministers of the City Churches to dinner, But Dr Robert Buchanan and the other lights of the Scottish Guardian would have none of it. They not only did not attend the dinner, but did not even reply to the invitation”.³¹

With the defeat of Chalmers, therefore, the Conservative party in Scotland had demonstrated its determination in the defence of the great institutions of church and state, and the prospects of any legislative alternative to a Disruption had virtually vanished. The importance of the Chalmers episode must not be exaggerated, however: the contest was violent but brief, and the deterioration of relations between the two sides had arguably acquired its own momentum.

So Glasgow had acquired a new professor of divinity, the worthy Dr Hill, and the students were in safe if uninspiring hands. Some guesses may be made at their later reactions to this

29 New College Library, CP, Buchanan to Chalmers.

30 Hanna, *Memoirs*, iv, 226-7; Watt, *Chalmers*, 224.

31 Murray, *Memories*, 72. There was a curious footnote to this in the following December. Professor Ramsay, who had been one of the Chalmers supporters, moved that an honorary D.D. be conferred upon Buchanan, a proposal that was “cordially and unanimously agreed to”. But this presumed attempt at conciliation was unsuccessful too. (N. L. Walker, *Dr Robert Buchanan, an ecclesiastical biography* (Edinburgh, 1877), 231.)

choice, but there is more direct evidence of their immediate response. In November 1840, the students voted for a successor to Graham as lord rector. Aberdeen himself had been suggested as a candidate by McFarlan, but had declined. The victor turned out to be the Marquis of Breadalbane, whose one claim to distinction would seem to be his profound sympathies for the Evangelical cause. When the result was announced, the students reportedly "gave three cheers for Dr Chalmers". Both sides saw it as a setback for the Moderate establishment. "There has been some great mismanagement at Glasgow . . . which I am unable to explain", Aberdeen had written to Peel.³² Buchanan hoped that the result "will read a lesson to some of our Conservative leaders."³³

Chalmers, who had been embroiled in controversy for most of his life, may well have been less disappointed by the Glasgow decision than many of his supporters. To them it was, if nothing else, a confirmation of the university's reputation for advancing mediocrity wherever it could be found. In the short run, perhaps, the results could be counted as a draw. The strength of popular feeling had been amply demonstrated in the divinity chair furore and the rectorial election. But the Conservative and Moderate establishment had also demonstrated, with great tenacity and strength of purpose, its ability to resist it.

32 BL, Add. MSS. 40312, Peel Papers, 24 Nov. 1840; see also BL, Add. MSS. 43327, Aberdeen to Hope, 16 Oct., 22 Oct. 1840.

33 New College Library, CP, letter to Chalmers, 16 Nov. 1840.